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THE PUBLIC AND THE COAL CONFLICT.

BY HENRY EDWARD ROOD.

I AM one of some seventy-odd millions of Americans who use anthracite coal, and who, in consequence, have direct and personal interest in John Mitchell's recent threat (as reported in newspaper despatches from Tamaqua and Shamokin, Pennsylvania), to create another famine in fuel next year, unless the anthracite mine-workers are granted an eight-hours working day, and, moreover, unless the United Mine Workers of America are "recognized"; by which, I suppose, Mr. Mitchell means that none but members of that labor-union are to be employed in the mines. Now, I have no more interest in John Mitchell than in John Smith, or Bill Jones,—so long as he refrains from interfering with my inalienable right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. But when any man publicly serves notice that, unless (or until) the coal operators grant his demands, he will deprive me of fuel in 1906, (thereby endangering the health and life of my wife and my children), I have a personal account to settle with him.

I can get along in reasonable comfort without silk underwear, or champagne, or diamond shirt-studs. But I don't propose to get along without coal, or flour or salt. If a supposititious Hiram Doolittle should absolutely shut down the production of flour or salt for any conceivable purpose; if, when I demanded these necessities to health, he should laugh in my face, I think I should have something to say to Mr. Doolittle; and I should feel justified in making sure that he never would be able to repeat the outrage.

As to the merits of Mr. Mitchell's demands, on behalf of the United Mine Workers, I am not prepared to speak; nor of the coal operators' side of the question. I have little more than an

academic interest in their endless controversy, although, of course, like other good citizens, I earnestly desire justice for both operators and workers of the mines. I belong to the third party to this anthracite question—the general public; the party which, in the end, undergoes the real suffering as well as the real expense attendant upon strikes. And, like seventy million of my brethren and sisters, I am getting somewhat tired of Mr. Mitchell's threat to make us freeze; to deprive many of us of our livelihood by shutting down factories and mills; to lessen the number of trains by which we travel; to close schools and churches—unless we force the mine operators to grant the demands of the union which he represents. All of these things, you remember, he did in 1902.

When one comes to think of it, the situation—in spite of its seriousness—is laughable, ridiculous; a fit subject for some comic-opera librettist. Three years ago this month, John Mitchell was proving to his own satisfaction, and to the amazement of the civilized world, that he possessed more actual power than the police and the courts of Pennsylvania; more power than the entire National Guard of that State; more power than could be wielded directly and indirectly by the moneyed capital of the country concentrated in Wall Street. A private citizen of very moderate education, of limited experience in life, this man calmly took the United States of America by the throat, and maintained his merciless grip until he had choked it into submission. That is not a very nice thing to admit; but free-born American citizens who shivered with empty furnaces, in 1902, or gladly paid at the rate of twenty dollars per ton for six-dollar anthracite (when they could get it in quarter-ton lots), should not be squeamish, although the remembrance of their impotence does make their ears burn for very shame. The question which concerns some seventy millions of Americans, just now, is whether the United Mine Workers of America are going to make us suffer next year as they did three years ago.

Now, I have no fault to find with Mr. Mitchell as an individual. I have no concern with him as a private citizen, and am here referring to him solely in his capacity as chief of a band of some 100,000 men and boys which threatens to deprive me, in the near future, of what is practically a necessary of life. I don't care a fig what quarrel he and his union may have with the

mine owners and operators. If they have differences of opinion about hours of labor, scales of wages or the origin of the moon, it is all one to me. Likewise, I am not interested in the other side—that of the mine owners and operators and the coal-carrying railroads. I have no axe to grind for either side. But when either party to the contest deliberately tramples on my rights as a consumer of anthracite, I make bold to protest. Some fourteen years ago, the late A. A. McLeod undertook to control the supply of anthracite through the Reading Railroad deal, which, as a menace to the public welfare, was crushed by the courts. The McLeod plan was to effect a combination of all operators and owners of mines and of all the coal-carrying roads, so that an absolute monopoly of anthracite could be established and maintained. Audacious as this scheme was, it is doubtful whether even Mr. McLeod ever dreamed of using his power to raise the price of anthracite to \$16, \$18, \$20 per ton, or to shut off the production altogether, for any purpose under the sun.

In order that the uninformed general reader may understand something of the conditions attendant upon a strike, a few words may not be out of place concerning the anthracite fields, in northeastern Pennsylvania, which cover a small, compact territory, holding practically all the available supply of hard coal in this country. A few cities of considerable size and a number of large towns, together with scores of hamlets termed “mining patches,” are scattered through a wild, desolate, mountainous region. Originally, most of the mine-workers were Irish, or of Irish extraction. At the time of the “long strike,” a quarter of a century ago, there was a minority of Scotch, German, Welsh, and American miners and laborers; but the Irish predominated, and were then, as ever, the principal leaders in the fight. They refused to give in, and peace was finally reached by compromise, after months of struggle. It was then that one of the operators, now deceased, wishing to prevent future strikes, sent an agent abroad to bring back here a ship-load of peasants from Austria-Hungary, who were ignorant, stupid, accustomed to labor for a pittance; and who regarded America as a sort of mundane Paradise, where even the poorest man had some rights. The agent found no difficulty in securing his cargo of human freight, and the foreigners duly arrived in the coal regions. They proved themselves capable of doing the hardest work, were satisfied with

wages on which an American would starve, and when they robbed or murdered it was usually among themselves. Other operators took the hint, and the steamship companies saw a golden opportunity. Not merely Austria-Hungary, but parts of Poland, Italy, Sicily were tapped, and the stream of immigrants quickly became a flood. A decade later, the original residents of the coal regions awoke to the fact that they had a problem on their hands. By that time, excepting in cities and towns, this imported foreign population, according to careful estimate, was several times as large as the American, Irish, German and Welsh combined. Very few of the immigrants brought their families hither. Most of them came to this country intending to remain but a few years, saving, from their wages of fifty cents or a dollar *per diem*, what was to them a competency wherewith to return to their native land. Here and there were men of intelligence who quickly became small merchants, cobblers, etc., and there were priests, of course. But practically all of the earlier arrivals were densely ignorant, superstitious, firm believers in witchcraft, convinced that because of a lack of military display there was no such thing as law in America. Too many of them had good reason to believe there was no such thing as justice, either. Often oppressed by foremen, constables, unscrupulous merchants and justices of the peace, it is no wonder they became unruly. Violent by nature, accustomed to drinking vile concoctions of alcoholic liquors which would drive ordinary men crazy, they added a very undesirable element to the population. The first thing a "Hunk" would buy was a revolver. If he could not afford one, he would select a couple of large stones and carry them in his pockets, ready for use. The Italian's earliest purchase was a stiletto, or, lacking it, he would buy, beg, or steal a file, sit down by the roadside, grind it (with stones) to a needlelike point, stick the blunt end in a corncob for a handle, and go on his way rejoicing.

Labor-leaders, of course, quickly saw an opportunity to swell the membership of their unions, and, when necessary, put forth convincing arguments. A sample may be found in the case of a brawny "Hunk" who was working on a stripping, some years ago, when a walking delegate and several companions approached, told him a strike was on, and ordered him to cease work. He couldn't understand. He had left home and travelled

four thousand miles in order to work; that was why he had come to America. So one of the strangers tapped him over the head with a pick-handle. The foreigner dropped, grunted, rose to his feet slightly dazed, and went to work again. The stranger hit him harder next time, and when he dropped he lay there longer before struggling to his feet, and resuming his task. Then the stranger struck him over the skull with the flat side of the pick-axe itself, and the "scab" foreigner sank down slowly, and lay there a limp, bloody mass of inert humanity. When he got out of the doctor's hands, a fortnight later, his head still swathed in bandages, the strike was over; but he joined the union. It was wiser, on the whole.

Since those early days of innocence, tens of thousands of foreigners have learned, to their own satisfaction, at least, that employers and officers of the law are natural enemies of the laboring-man, whose savior—the labor-leader and strike agitator—is to be obeyed implicitly, at no matter what cost. That there were grounds for such belief must be freely admitted by those cognizant of the innumerable forms of petty graft and picayune oppression visited upon these people. For example, in 1891, when the semi-monthly-pay law was being violated by certain of the operators, to the great inconvenience of mine-workers, if not, indeed, to their distress, I went to Harrisburg to acquaint the State authorities with the fact, in the hope of having the law enforced. It was in midsummer, and none of the higher officials could be found; but I was informed that while such a law had been passed, owing to the insistence of the "labor vote," yet all mention of a penalty had been purposely omitted. So there was no way in which to punish the offenders.

It was not until the summer of 1897, however, that the foreigners showed how desperate they could be when fully aroused. Of the controversy leading up to and resulting in the local strike of 1897, in the Hazleton region, I have nothing to say. Whether the men were in the right as to their demands, or the employing operators, does not concern me in the least; but as the terror inspired by the disturbances of eight years ago may have a direct bearing on my comfort next year, I beg to recall it, in some measure, so that the reader may have an idea of the responsibility which is assumed by a man who orders or conducts a strike in the anthracite fields. I wish to

state here, that Mr. Mitchell did not conduct the Hazleton-region strike of 1897, and the wholesale tragedy that ensued has not been repeated—as yet. But it showed plainly how powerless the employers and the local authorities are to control anthracite-mine workers when they are once enraged. The strike of 1897 originated at a colliery several miles south of the city of Hazleton, and for a time matters were comparatively quiet. One day, however, we learned that the foreign strikers, led by some of the old hands, had commenced “marching.” Now, in the anthracite region, the “marching” of miners on strike means something serious. If you are a mine-worker living in a remote mining-patch and have refused to join the union, it is not reassuring to learn that a “march” has commenced in your direction; for you know that means that a score, or a hundred, or two hundred, reckless, desperate men, armed with clubs, are bearing down on your home to try the effect of moral suasion—so called. Furthermore, you know that mighty little sympathy will be wasted on you if you are beaten to a pulp, or are knocked down and have your ribs kicked in or one of your eyes gouged out. Most of the local newspapers are hearty supporters of the labor element for purposes of revenue; and correspondents of almost all the city newspapers know that it is better, for increased circulation, to support a hundred thousand laboring men, than to defend half a dozen railroad corporations, and possibly a hundred individual operators—the anathematized “Coal Barons” of journalistic parlance. After a few days of mild “marching” in 1897, the mobs grew in number and volume. They fed on excitement, and as they went careering along the country roads they seized and impressed into their ranks men who had nothing to do with the strike. Drivers of grocery wagons were taken from their seats, commercial travellers were pulled from their buggies, and other outsiders were forced to go along with the hooting, yelling, threatening mob *en route* to use “moral suasion” on some mine-workers who had refused to join their ranks.

At that time the sheriff of Luzerne County was James Martin, a man who was striving to live up to his oath of office. He tried for weeks, with a posse of deputies, to maintain order, but in vain, for violence increased alarmingly. On Friday, September 10th, he and his men hurried from point to point where mobs had gathered, and he read the riot act to them over and over

again with no results. Late in the afternoon, he learned that a mob of foreigners was marching toward Lattimer to use moral suasion on men living there who refused to go on strike; and he hurried thither in a trolley-car, at the request of the superintendent of the colliery, to protect the people and the mining-plant. He and his deputies arrived ahead of the mob, and the deputies, armed with Winchester rifles, were lined up on private property belonging to the coal company. When the mob came in sight Sheriff Martin stepped out to the public highway and attempted to read the riot act once more; when he was seized, knocked down, and kicked into a ditch by the "marchers." It was then that some or all of the deputies fired at the mob, and rushed forward to rescue Mr. Martin. Twenty-two of the mob were killed outright, and thirty-nine wounded were taken, as quickly as possible, to the surgical hospital in Hazleton. As I wrote, at the time, for *Harper's Weekly*:

"The excitement in Hazleton and in the surrounding towns Friday night was simply terrible. The streets were choked with men and women, who shrieked curses at the 'bloody butchers,' the 'hired murderers,' and 'corporation assassins,' as the deputies were called; and there is little doubt that, if any of them had been found on the streets, he would have met assault and perhaps death at the hands of the enraged populace. It is a fact, almost beyond belief, that within a few hours after the awful event at Lattimer irresponsible blatant politicians had seized the opportunity to further their hold upon the so-called 'laboring classes' by demanding the execution of Sheriff Martin and his deputies, and by speaking of the 'bloody massacre' and of the 'martyred dead.'

"For some reason news of the encounter at Lattimer travelled slowly through the country to the southward of Hazleton, and did not reach the mining-town of Macadoo until about nine o'clock at night; and then the report in that vicinity was to the effect that a large proportion of the English and American miners at Lattimer had started to murder all the foreign miners who could be found. Within an hour, two to three thousand maddened foreigners were sweeping over the mountain roads, firing revolvers and guns into the air, and shrieking that they would kill every white man in Lattimer and burn the town. They intended to sack the gun-stores in Hazleton on their way—at least such was the report brought to Hazleton by a courier on horseback, who had escaped notice of the mob and had got ahead of them. He aroused a number of gentlemen in Hazleton, who seized the weapons with which they had provided themselves since the riot began, and ran toward a prearranged rendezvous on Broad Street. In some cases families were sent into the cellars of their homes, and in others wives and elder daughters sat, guns in hand, at upper windows, ready to cover the retreat of husband and

father should the men be driven by the mob from the corner by the Presbyterian Church, where it was decided to make a first stand. But, fortunately, the mob at Macadoo defeated its own purpose. In order to prevent the people of Hazleton from learning of its action, all telephone wires had been cut; and when a courier from Hazleton rode back toward Macadoo and told the on-coming rioters that regiments of the National Guard already were pouring into Hazleton, the statement could not be disproved, and of course the cowardly mob dispersed and ran to cover. Meanwhile, the courier first mentioned had pushed on from Hazleton to Lattimer, and before midnight that town was literally deserted, with the exception of one Welshman, who stayed in his house with his wife, who was too ill to be moved. All the other English-speaking people—men, women, and children—fled without stopping to dress. Through the woods and over the wild mountain roads they hurried, women and children as well as men, stumbling through briars and over rocks and logs in their bare feet, and facing the cold and dampness clad only in their nightclothes. Some who were too feeble for flight hid in shafts of the mines, and others buried themselves to the neck in the loose dirt of culm-piles. It was a night of terror indeed, and not until the sun was well up did any of the people return to Lattimer. . . .

“Governor Hastings ordered the Third Brigade of the National Guard of Pennsylvania, together with two detachments of cavalry, to proceed to Hazleton, and his order was telegraphed shortly before midnight on Friday. At twenty minutes past six o’clock Saturday morning the first of the transport trains came slowly into Hazleton, twenty picked guards, with loaded and bayoneted rifles, standing on the locomotive and examining the tracks for dynamite cartridges, which, it was feared, might have been placed thereupon. Thirteen hours after the Governor’s order had been issued, the entire brigade of 2,800 men had reached Hazleton, and had reported for duty to Brigadier-General Gobin.”

Within a fortnight the region was quieted; and as soon as the people learned that they really could go to work, without danger of being clubbed, or stabbed, or having their houses burned, the mining of coal was resumed.

It was not until after the Lattimer tragedy that Mr. Mitchell arrived in the anthracite fields, and achieved his prominence there as organizer, later as President, of the United Mine Workers of America. By the year 1900 he had a strong membership; and this, together with the fact that a Presidential election was impending, made favorable conditions for a strike. The coal region was practically tied up. Demands, conferences with operators, conventions, followed one another in rapid succession; and, for a wonder, there was little violence at first. But the operators showed a surprising amount of courage; for weeks they would not give in—not even when they knew that possibly a Presidential

election hung in the balance; for, of course, a large section of the press tried to make political capital of the affair. Mr. Mitchell conducted his end of the strike in such a way as to compel admiration, all the time counselling peace and moderation. But at this juncture there appeared in the Hazleton region a gray-haired woman, since known to fame as "Mother" Jones, and she supplied the spark that was necessary to start the rioting, create a reign of terror, call out the troops once more, and finally have the operators consent to a compromise on the eve of the election of President McKinley. While Mr. Mitchell was visiting one point after another, all over the region, consulting with his general staff, directing the campaign in every possible way, and assuring the reporters that his men must and would preserve law and order, and refrain from violence, "Mother" Jones was going from village to village making wild harangues, working her hearers up to a point of high excitement, and leading mobs of half-frenzied women and girls on wild moonlight raids through the woods, from patch to patch, terrorizing the wives of non-union miners so that their husbands could get no peace at home until they joined Mr. Mitchell's organization. If you have ever seen a mob of these desperate "Amazons of the Coal Regions," as they have been fancifully termed, you will understand that it is no child's play to oppose them. If you have any doubts in the matter, ask any coal-and-iron policeman to relate some of his experiences with them. That Mr. Mitchell employed the Jones woman to go out and make trouble, was generally disclaimed, at the time, by supporters of the United Mine Workers of America. And I am reasonably sure that the owners and operators of the mines did not bring her to the region, and pay her hotel bill and other expenses. It is possible, of course, that she came there of her own volition, and at her own expense, in a spirit of helpfulness and self-sacrifice. But I never heard that Mr. Mitchell repudiated her; and he certainly did not make her stop her harangues and raids through the country.

In due time, General Gobin and the National Guard again came rushing up the Lehigh Valley, to take charge of Mr. Mitchell's first spectacular anthracite strike. The troops, with headquarters at Shenandoah, found the inhabitants of the country reaping a whirlwind indeed. General Gobin was unable, even

with the large force at his command, to restore order. His cavalry rode hard and swiftly day and night over the mountains; his infantry patrolled villages and well-travelled roads. But riots and individual cases of outrage by the score were reported in remote localities. There was no let-up to the guerilla warfare; nor to Mr. Mitchell's public insistence that members of his union should preserve law and order; nor, by the same token, to "Mother" Jones's wild harangues at meeting after meeting of strikers and sympathizers. Meanwhile, cold weather was approaching; so was election day. A roar of indignation went up from the country over the scarcity and high prices of anthracite. Demagogue newspapers and demagogue politicians suppressed the truth as to violence, outrage, assault, murder, terrorism due to the strike, and launched their political batteries with telling effect at the mine owners and operators, whom they alleged to be engaged in a remorseless conspiracy to make serfs of the mine-workers, to grind their faces in the dust, to place on them the shackles of industrial slavery. And Mr. Mitchell, marvellously calm and self-contained in the storm-centre of it all, kept up the courage of his men, refusing to forego a point or sue for peace. Then suddenly, a few days before President McKinley's election, the strike was declared off, order was restored, the troops went home, and coal-mining was resumed. Friends of the mine owners and operators did not hesitate to assert that extreme political pressure forced a yielding to Mr. Mitchell's demands. At any rate, it was Mr. Mitchell's followers, not the operators, who seemed to be particularly happy over the outcome; and, because of this victory against tremendous odds, the United Mine Workers had a large and loyal membership in 1902, when Mr. Mitchell assumed the responsibility of conducting his second anthracite strike, which all of us recall with a shiver.

This time violence and outrage were long continued, and for the reason that among the sheriffs of the anthracite counties there was none courageous enough to defy the labor vote, and call for troops, until rioting had assumed the proportions of an insurrection. The Governor of Pennsylvania cannot send troops to a county where disorder prevails, unless the sheriff thereof confesses his inability to maintain law and order, and asks for military assistance. The coal-region sheriff who has any regard for a political future (or any other career, for that matter)

knows that his business is to keep the National Guard as far away from his territory as possible; and he will do almost anything rather than call on Harrisburg for help. Matters went from bad to worse in 1902, until, finally, the Governor sent the entire National Guard of the State—infantry, cavalry, artillery, an army of some ten thousand men—to put down the insurrection. And after he had this army in the field (General Gobin testified later), it was literally unable to cope with the situation.

All this may seem ancient history; but the point I wish to bring out is that, during the anthracite strike of 1897, the mine-workers learned that they had nothing to fear from local police, and very little from county officials.* They stopped rioting not because their leaders told them to, but because General Gobin and the troops arrived on the scene a few hours after the Lattimer affair. The next thing they learned was that in a national exigency political pressure could be brought to bear on the operators, when nothing else would force them to yield. This was in 1900. Finally, in 1902, the anthracite-mine workers learned, to their unbounded satisfaction, that the entire military force of the State of Pennsylvania was unable to control riotous conditions attendant upon their strike; that neither they nor their leader would be called upon to take any consequences of wholesale rioting. They learned that, realizing the inefficiency of the government of Pennsylvania, the President of the United States felt there was only one way to end a situation that literally was "intolerable" to a large proportion of the American people. Therefore, in 1902, an armistice was accepted by Mr. Mitchell; rioting and minor disorders ceased; and the manager of the strike went to Washington, in his capacity of plenipotentiary, to talk over a possible treaty of peace with envoys representing the mine owners and operators.

The important thing to be noted right here—to have a large pin stuck in it for future reference—is the fact that *rioting, assault, intimidation, throughout the entire anthracite region, ceased when Mr. Mitchell agreed to a truce pending arrangements for a treaty of peace.* Comment on this would be superfluous.

* It will be a long, long time before another sheriff's posse fires on a mob of rioters in Pennsylvania. Future deputy sheriffs will have no earnest desire to be tried for murder, as were Martin's men, even with chances of acquittal in their favor.

In spite of the enormous funds in his treasury, and in spite of contributions obtained through systematic solicitation by Mr. Mitchell's representatives in many cities and towns, there is not the slightest question that the strike of 1902 would have been adjusted long before cold weather, had it not been for the violence and disorder that terrorized miners and laborers alike who wanted to work right along in support of their families. I have no hesitancy in declaring, from the point of view of a disinterested observer, that a general strike in the anthracite region could not by any possibility last longer than three or four months, provided law and order were maintained, and secret terrorism prevented. That is the kernel of the whole matter, and it is patent to every one who personally knows the conditions prevailing in the anthracite fields. Furthermore, there is no question whatever that a strong, sanely managed labor-union is, in the long run, necessary to the peace, prosperity, and liberties of the mine-workers. Unlimited power on the part of operators—unlimited power in any hands—cannot but result in oppression and injustice. Not merely the mine-workers, but every American, would be the better off if Mr. Mitchell's union were conducted with real intelligence, wise moderation, due regard for law, and for the public opinion that creates law. The United Mine Workers of America would be a powerful agent in our civilization if it substituted business acumen, skilful diplomacy, fair dealing with employers and with the public, for the strikes and resulting violence and general suffering which have made it despised and heartily hated throughout the country, even by those who are afraid to express openly their real feeling in the matter.

At the present time, according to despatches from Tamaqua and Shamokin, Mr. Mitchell, as President of the United Mine Workers, is covertly threatening, by means of a strike next year, to seize us by the throat, and choke us until—when we can stand the pressure no longer—we force the mine owners and operators to submit to his demands. His demands, or some of them, may be fair and just; but, if he wants to make people believe that they are, he needs to cease his threats instantly, and propose a settlement of all questions involved through a board of arbitration. In the court of last resort, that of public opinion, the counsellor who has fairness and right on his side does not find it necessary or desirable to appear with bowie-knives and revolvers

bristling in his belt. According to the Tamaqua despatch, Mr. Mitchell asks for a working-day of eight hours, which may or may not be reasonable. And he also demands that no man be permitted to earn a living for himself and his family in the anthracite mining industry, *unless he is a member of Mr. Mitchell's organization* and contributes to its finances. If Mr. Mitchell would devote as much time and money to making his union attractive, and valuable and respected, as in conducting strikes, he simply couldn't keep mine-workers out of it. They would flock to his banner from foreman to driver-boy and slate-picker—every one of them; and the public, as well as they, would be all the better for it. Instead of expending \$2,400,000 in a disastrous war, like that of 1902, low rates of insurance could be given to the members, libraries could be maintained, lecture-courses and other entertainments provided, sick-benefit funds and better schools established. If the United Mine Workers of America were that kind of an organization, its power and influence would be inestimable, irresistible. It could get anything in reason that it asked of the operators; for it would be upheld, supported, endorsed, by the entire Nation.

During his personally conducted anthracite strikes, Mr. Mitchell has seen one of the most populous regions of the United States undergo industrial paralysis for months at a time; a multitude of women and children without sufficient food, clothing, medicines; hundreds of fathers unable to pay rent for their little homes; troops by the thousand, five thousand, ten thousand, thrown into the field in a vain effort to end pandemonium and restore American liberty with arguments of lead and cold steel; millions of innocent people, from Detroit to the Atlantic seaboard, suffering seriously because they were deprived of fuel. And no man can tell how many of the aged, feeble, frail, died as a direct result of his strike of 1902.

Brave, indeed, or reckless beyond comprehension, or drunk with lust of power, must be the man who, knowing the conditions, would dare to order or manage another anthracite strike, unless those who blindly follow him are in direst distress, in perilous extremity from which there is no other possible escape!

HENRY EDWARD ROOD.